



CRS Parent Connection

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

Volume 18, Number 1



Winter 2010

CRS state parent consultant wins national award

Susan Colburn, state parent consultant for Children's Rehabilitation Service, is being honored for her work in promoting greater involvement and inclusion for Alabama's families of children and youth with special health care needs.

Colburn is the third recipient of the Merle McPherson Family Leadership Award, a national honor presented by the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP). The award was given out at the AMCHP conference in Maryland on March 9. Colburn, who was unable to attend, accepted the award through a video.

"I am very humbled," Colburn said of the award. "The nicest part about the award is who it's named after; Dr. McPherson really believed in family involvement and had a vision for changing health systems. It's a tremendous honor to receive an award that bears her name."

The award was established in January 2007, a year after McPherson retired from the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau, where she served as director of the Division of Services for Children with Special Health Needs from 1987-2006. She left a legacy of leadership and vision for how to create a new model of family-centered health care delivery for children and youth with special health care needs.

Colburn was voted to receive the honor by



CRS State Parent Consultant Susan Colburn poses with her family

her counterparts in other states.

The McPherson award is the highest recognition for exemplary contributions to connecting families and professionals within maternal and child health programs, said Michael R. Fraser, chief executive officer of AMCHP.

Melinda Davis, assistant commissioner for Children's Rehabilitation Service, praised Colburn for her efforts on behalf of Alabama families.

"Susan is well-known at the community, state and national levels for her leadership and advocacy in family-centered health care delivery," Davis said. "She's devoted countless hours over the last 20-plus years to sharing her vision for children and youth with special health care needs and their families. She's very deserving of this award, which acknowledges her dedication to furthering collaboration between families and professionals."

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CRS Parent Connection

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Parent Connection is a complimentary newsletter published by Children's Rehabilitation Service for families of children with special health care needs. The goal of this newsletter is to increase communication and share information about children with special health care needs and their families. The newsletter reflects a family-centered theme throughout and serves as a forum for family members to share information, thoughts, feelings, concerns, etc. Nothing printed or implied in this publication constitutes an endorsement by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

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From the Director's Chair



Hello, Parents and Caregivers,

First the great news!! I would like to personally congratulate our statewide parent consultant, Susan Colburn for being selected by the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP) Family and Youth Leadership Committee to receive the Merle McPherson Family Leadership Award. You read about Susan's award on the cover of this newsletter, but this kind of national recognition deserves to be mentioned more than once. As you may know, Susan has worked for over 20 years sharing her vision for children and youth with special health care needs and their families. Here in Alabama, she represents the family perspective at the state level and provides leadership for the activities of our local parent consultants and local parent advisory committees across the state. Susan is also well known at the national level for her leadership and advocacy in family centered health care delivery. Commissioner Boswell and the entire ADRS/CRS family are very proud of Susan. She is very deserving of this honor.

Now, for the budget news (not so good)! You've probably been keeping up with the news on television and radio as the governor and legislators try to work through a very difficult situation for the state of Alabama. The economy has improved somewhat, however, the state is still in proration. ADRS is one of many state agencies in need of increased funding for needed services. The governor has proposed that CRS receive \$10,785,733.00 for FY (fiscal year) 2011 which reflects no increase over the prorated amount allocated for the current fiscal year, FY 2010. So far, we have suffered through continued proration, reducing our operational costs significantly in order to limit the impact of any cuts to client services. Following is a snapshot of where we stand today.

- In just two fiscal years, state funding for CRS has decreased \$4.3 million, or 28 percent.
- The number of children served by the program has grown from 10,324 in 2006 to 12,499 in 2009, or by 21 percent.
- Travel for staff has been severely limited, so children and families receive fewer home visits by CRS nurses, physical therapists, social workers, etc.
- CRS staff make fewer visits to children in their schools and daycares.
- CRS continues to limit the purchase of secondary seating systems.
- The CRS fee schedule for families has been adjusted, resulting in increased costs for families.
- Staff training has been severely limited, causing specialty staff to forego state-of-the art training.
- CRS's funding from the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant was level- funded again and is \$200,000 less than the FY 2008.

Please share CRS' needs with your legislators and advocacy groups as you have the opportunity. Your expressions of the benefits your child/children receive through our services have a significant impact on decisions made by our state senators and representatives. They want to know that you appreciate and need what CRS has to offer. The bullet points above will be very helpful for you to use in your conversations.

Thank you for your support.

Melinda M. Davis
Assistant Commissioner, CRS

Field trips a challenge for children with special needs

Field trips are fun outings for most schoolchildren, but they can border on the stuff of nightmares for children with special needs. It takes thoughtful planning to prevent the stress, disruption, and disappointment that can result for some children and youth who have more than ordinary needs. Sometimes our school systems lack awareness of legal rights and responsibilities for these atypical days, but always there is a need for clear communication between schools and families in the basic needs of children and youth with special health care needs during these excursions from their school.

My daughter has special needs and is in fourth grade now. It is my privilege to share some lessons-learned and thoughts to guide those who haven't experienced this yet. My daughter has had two field trips each school year and only missed one trip because we already had planned to miss that school day for other reasons. However, my first thought when I hear of an upcoming trip is always, "What happens if I don't want my child to go on the field trip?" If you are anything like me, you question whether the trip will be a safe and productive experience for your child, and you may be tempted to just say no. But what happens to your child then? If the entire class is going, and most likely the entire grade, what will your child do at school? Won't your child be missing a great opportunity to socialize with friends? If you don't want to keep your child home, then you must find a way to make the trip doable.

Now that we've established that your baby is going on this trip, I suggest you ask, "Can I go on the field trip, too?" A word of warning here: Be prepared when they say, "Yes." I feel that the best way to make a field trip a good experience for your child is to go along as a chaperone. My daughter's school has always been very accommodating about letting me (or my husband or my mother-in-law) go. Make your case to your child's teacher or the school principal that you will be able to help monitor your child's behavioral or medical needs, thus relieving the school of its responsibility



Patricia Switzer of Family Voices of Alabama enjoys a field trip to Moundville with her daughter, Sarah

of finding a nurse or someone authorized to dispense medicine for the day, but you may need to be prepared to assist with other children as well if there are limited chaperones.

Depending on the number of chaperones, students may be led around in large herds or small groups. Depending on the age of the students, they may be watched closely or given some freedom to roam. Since your child's needs may differ from that of the other students, make sure there will be personnel available to give him (or her) the supervision needed. If your child has a one-on-one aide, make sure she or he will not be assigned to lead other children as well.

If you aren't able to go along on the trip and your child gets a nurse's assistance with managing ADHD, diabetes, asthma, or other medication needs during a regular school day, then make sure there will be a nurse on the trip to fill that function while away from school. It may be a nurse who doesn't work at your school and isn't familiar with your child, so you may want to speak with her or him before to share details of your child's care. If a teacher or staff person will be filling this role, you will want to make sure they know what they'll be

doing and how to reach you should they have a question while away from school.

Next, you need to ask, "What exactly will my child be doing on this field trip?" You know better than anyone what sort of activities present obstacles for your child. Maybe your child's "test" is sitting still and being quiet, as would be the case at a play or concert. Maybe it's tolerating heat, as might be an issue at outdoor attractions. Maybe it's walking long distances, as it is for my daughter. Unfortunately, all of our trips have come with this challenge, so I now ask for the contact details of the person at the site. I contact that person and discuss my daughter's unique needs with that coordinator. Armed with this knowledge, I discuss strategies for dealing with the anticipated problems and share them with my daughter's teacher so the teacher can ensure my child's experience is managed effectively.

I hope that I was able to help you in some way. If you live in Montgomery, then maybe I'll see you there when my daughter's class visits in April.

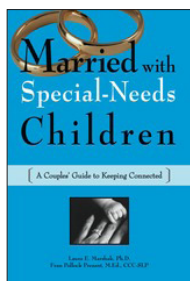
Patricia Switzer
Family Resource Specialist
Family Voices of Alabama

Book Review:

“Married with Special-Needs Children”

There are general notions that having children with disabilities puts such a strain on a marriage that it places it at great risk.

If you are married, “Married with Special-Needs Children, a Couples’ Guide to Keeping Connected,” written by Laura E. Marshak and



Fran P. Prezant, is a great book to avoid or address that strain on your marriage.

Chapters in this book deal with subject matters such as building foundations and early stages of adjusting to your child’s disabilities.

It also gives you solutions to problems in your relationship. Some of the solutions include using supports outside of your family, increasing romance, and making time for you and your spouse.

Hundreds of couples were interviewed for this book. The authors share candid anecdotes from parents who have “lived it” and offer a wealth of sensitive and realistic suggestions to make a marriage work.

This book eases concerns and addresses a broad range of marital and parenting issues, including communication breakdowns; lack of romance and sexual intimacy; conflict over parenting styles and roles; and different coping and problem-solving methods.

It also offers tips on how to manage stress, second marriages and blended families; ways to talk about difficult subjects; and community resources and support outside of the family. For parents looking for ways to strengthen their family, marriage, and prevent future problems, this book is a positive first step.

You will recognize yourselves in these pages and feel comfort in knowing that you are not alone! It has a great index and a good list of resources, foundations, and books for suggested reading.

Odessa Taylor

Parent consultant, Selma



Jared Merrill uses the Tango, an augmentative communication device, with the assistance of his mother

Tango! gives Huntsville teen a new way to communicate

Jared Merrill was ready for his brother’s return.

For more than six months, he practiced using the augmentative communication device, called a Tango!, provided to him by Children’s Rehabilitation Service (CRS). He prepared a message for his older brother, Thomas, who was returning home from a two-year mission trip to Germany.

Seventeen-year-old Jared has cerebral palsy, an anoxic brain injury, and spastic quadriplegia. Unable to speak, he wanted to surprise his brother with his new method of communication.

When Thomas arrived at the Huntsville airport, everyone was excited to see him. Jared, in the meantime, calmly reached for the Tango! switch so he could deliver a message to his sibling.

“Welcome home, Thomas. I’m so happy to see you. I love you, Thomas. Can I have a hug? Let’s get your luggage,” the message read.

There wasn’t a dry eye in the family, as Jared easily used the Tango!, said Shelley Merrill, Jared and Thomas’ mother.

“Thomas was stunned that Jared was able to speak to him,” she said. “We’d kept the whole thing a secret.”

The Tango! was the first communication device Jared was able to use, his mother said. It uses regular language and whole phrases, making it easier for the young man to communicate.

Merrill said she is grateful to the Huntsville CRS office for introducing Jared to the Tango!.

“They’ve been tireless in trying to find a device he could use,” Shelley said. “I can’t say enough about their diligence and determination.” Jared uses his Tango! wherever he goes – whether church, school, or home.

The device allows the teen-ager to express exactly what he needs and wants. Before, when he couldn’t speak, his mother had to guess what he wanted, she said.

“This has opened up a new world for him,” Shelley said. “For me, seeing my child with a way to communicate has been a tremendous blessing.”

Alabama's Babies and Families are Pinning Their Future on You!

A Campaign for Help

Early intervention providers and thousands of Alabama's babies with developmental delays and their families are seeking help from the Alabama Legislature. Additional funding is needed for **Alabama's Early Intervention System** (AEIS) to continue providing critical services for infants, toddlers and families throughout the state.

Numerous studies show that for every dollar spent on early intervention, \$7 is saved in future costs of serving children. As Congress intended through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), early intervention supports children and families early and results in:

- A reduction in future special education costs and institutionalization
- Each child's preparation for school
- A strengthening of each family's capacity to care for their child
- Hope for families as they face overwhelming obstacles

"Pinning Their Future on You!" is a statewide effort to inform the general public and legislators of the importance of early intervention services for children with disabilities and their family.

Why is early intervention so important?

The most critical years of a young child's development occurs from birth to age 3. In many instances, children born with disabilities miss out on opportunities for growth and development because of family instability, poor child care options, emergency health situations and erratic health care. In addition, and all too often, there can be abuse and neglect that negatively affects a child's outcomes.

Here are some facts that we know:

- More and more babies are surviving premature births and are potentially in need of early intervention services.
- The early identification of babies with



autism and metabolic disorders has increased the need for services to be provided earlier (i.e., before the age of 3).

- Eighty-five percent of a child's brain development occurs by age 3, but less than 1 percent of Alabama's public investments on education and development have occurred by that time (Voices for America's Children).

- Research shows that children with disabilities who have quality early intervention opportunities require less special education in later years and are more likely to become employed and become more productive members of the business community.

Alabama's Early Intervention System Currently, early intervention services are provided in every county of the state through Alabama's Early Intervention System. More than 6,000 children are being served. However, AEIS is in a budget crisis! Babies are continually being identified as needing services and AEIS has less money to serve the babies currently in the system. Your HELP is needed! Without an increase in funding, community early intervention programs will not have the funds to enroll additional babies or continue serving the high number of babies they currently serve.

- In 1995, the first full year of Alabama's Early Intervention System, AEIS received \$3,170,604 in state funds to serve 2,158 babies and their families.

- In 1995, the amount allocated by the state Legislature for services was \$1,470 per child per year. In 2010, due to decreases in funding and proration, the state allocation is \$932 per child per year., a decrease of nearly 40 percent.

- In 2010, 15 years later, AEIS has received only \$5,630,888 in state dollars to serve all eligible children. In FY '09 the number of eligible children served was 6,045, and the number continues to grow!

All those who are concerned must rally together to make sure that funding **for this program is adequate to meet the needs of children in our state.** Together, we can make a difference!

NOTE: A Facebook page has been developed to further the cause. The link is www.facebook.com/#/pages/Pinning-Their-Future-On-You/176505069961. (If you are not a Facebook user, you may email Gary Edwards at gedwards@ucpbham.com to receive email updates.)

Raising a confident child

One thing that I have learned, through both being a parent of a son affected by spina bifida and by talking to many other families about their experiences, is that there is no manual out there on parenting a child with a disability that includes a chapter on how to help your child fulfill their dreams. It seems that every article, booklet, and other piece of literature includes all of the medical information that we need to make sure they are in the best physical health possible, which is very much needed, but I do wish that there was more of an emphasis on the ability and not the disability of our children.

From the first moment after the birth of a child with spina bifida, life definitely becomes very hectic and focused on the many trips to the hospital, doctors, and therapists. It seems that before we know it, the whirlwind effect has us in “survival mode” where we are just making it from one appointment time to another. It is so hard to just slow down and focus on the incredible blessing that we have in front of us, to appreciate the unique and wonderful person that God has created, and to wonder for what ultimate purpose He created them. No matter what purpose that may be, it is our job as parents to help our children become strong, confident individuals so they can fulfill their very special purpose in this world.

So what can we do to help our children overcome their challenges and reach their dreams? You won't be able to find very much when “Googling” topics like “encouraging self-esteem in children with disabilities,” because truthfully, there is no difference in encouraging self-esteem and confidence in a child with a disability than in a child that is not affected by a disability. There certainly might be more challenges along the way, but although our children do have special physical and emotional needs, they are also just kids.

One way we can encourage our children is to let them know that we believe in them.



Angie Pate, of the Spina Bifida Association of Alabama, poses with her sons at the beach.

Every article I have read about an adult with a disability who overcame challenges and reached their dreams, has talked about their parents “treating them the same as their siblings without disabilities” and “pushing them to work their hardest and do their best.” In other words, children can gain so much from their parents believing that they can do whatever they set their mind to and encouraging them to work hard to reach their goals.

Another way to help your child gain confidence is to give him or her responsibility. Chores are a wonderful way for children to gain self-confidence. The chores, of course, need to be based on your child's unique physical and emotional abilities. Sometimes it is the small, consistent successes that can benefit them the most. Another part of letting your child become responsible is to not over-parent. For instance, set goals for your child to be able to take care of his or her own daily living needs, such as dressing, catheterizing,

etc. Just because a child has special physical needs does not mean he or she cannot reach certain developmental goals earlier than a parent may think.

It is also important to let your child lead in this process. If we step back and quietly watch, we will learn more about our children's interest and talents. Find time to foster those interests and talents, whether it be playing a musical instrument, getting involved in organizations, such as Lakeshore Foundation in Birmingham, that have accessible sports, or allowing them to serve others within their community. Whatever his or her gifts, there is no better way to encourage confidence in your child than to let him or her get out there and show the world all he or she has to give!

Angie Pate

Spina Bifida Association of Alabama

Article used with permission from the January-March 2010 newsletter of the Spina Bifida Association of Alabama.

Boys and girls sports and activities for 2010

With spring coming up, there are many activities for your child to get involved in to stay active and get to know local children.

Here is a list of some of these activities:

2010 All Stars Baseball Registration: Held at Wald Park in Vestavia. To request a form, contact Hugh B. Dye at (205) 257-7612 or hbdye@southernco.com.

Ace Cheer Company - Bows & Arrows: Located at 3820 Ridgeway Drive, Birmingham. For more information, contact Bill Presson at (205) 769-3369 or (205) 994-4070, or go to www.acetribe.com.

AMBUCS: Located at 1900 27th Ave. S., Birmingham. For more information, call (205) 834-8580.

Great Park for Children with Special Needs: Located at Veteran's Park on Valleydale Road in Shelby County. For more information, go to www.shelbycountytourism.org/parks/Pages/VeteransParkonValleydale.aspx.

Hoover Recreation Center: located at 600 Municipal Drive, Hoover. For more information, call (205) 444-7777 or go to www.hooveral.org.

Opportunity League - Easter Seals: For more information, call Kelli Keith at (205) 314-2187 or Billy Crandall at (205) 620-6426.

Oak Mountain Youth Baseball/Softball Challenger League: Located at 5452 Cahaba Valley Road, Birmingham. For more information, call (205) 995-1776, or go to www.omybys.com.

Miracle League

Moody – For more information, email pdeason@moodymiracleleague.com.

Tuscaloosa - For more information, email John Miller at ljohn@miracleleagueof.tuscaloosa.com, or call (205) 633-1112 or (205) 310-4376.

Huntsville – For more information, go to www.huntsvillemiracleleague.org.

Montgomery – For more information, go to www.mtgml.com.

Troy – For more information, send an email to info@troymiracleleague.com.

No More Training Wheels: For more information, send an email to customerservice@notrainingwheels.net or call (205) 218-0756.

Special Equestrians: Located at 900 Woodward Drive, Pelham. For more information, call (205) 987-9462.

Special Olympics Alabama: Located at 880 S. Court St., Montgomery. For more information, call (334) 242-3383 or go to www.specialolympics.org.

VSA Arts of Alabama: Located at 1915 4th Ave. S., Birmingham. For more information, call at (205) 307-6300 or go to vsartalabama.org.

Cool nurse on wheels: *Nursing with spina bifida and a wheelchair*

“My parents were expecting to become the parents of a healthy baby girl. That turned out to not be the case. I was born with a form of spina bifida called myelomeningocele. The covering of my spinal cord and the spinal nerves from L4-L5 were in a sack outside of my back, creating permanent nerve damage from the area of L4 down.

My family raised me with a “can do” attitude, and I was never treated any differently than the other kids in my family. This attitude shaped who I am now.

Becoming a nurse was the ultimate goal for me, and from day one, I was not going to let anyone or anything stand in my way. It's what I was born to do. I e-mailed several nursing schools. All of the responses were negative. Some schools even offered me free counseling to change my major.

The only school I applied to was Wright State University. I decided to disclose my spina bifida in the essay that I was required to submit. I was elated when I got the letter of admittance.

The assistant dean vowed to help me. We would take it quarter by quarter, meeting prior to the start of each clinical. If it was not an essential function for nursing, then we discussed delegating the task. If I knew there was a lift or transfer that I could not perform, I asked a classmate to do it for me, promising to lend my help when he or she needed it.

I wanted to stay close to my friends and family after graduation, so I decided to look for jobs around Dayton. It was there that I got my first taste of what was to come.

I interviewed at numerous hospitals and even worked with recruiters, but I got turned down for every job. I disclosed my spina bifida before some interviews; for others, I did not say anything until I went into the interview room.

The excuses ranged from, “We want someone with more experience” to “You can't possibly do nursing with a wheelchair.”

I had filled out an application for the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. The

gentleman from human resources called me. I told him that I was interested in spinal cord injuries because of my history with spina bifida. He immediately asked me to come and interview.

I spent all day at RIC interviewing. I wasn't even out of the airport parking garage when I got a phone call requesting a second interview.

I now work at RIC as a registered nurse. I use my wheelchair for long distances, but I do walk in my patients' rooms. My patients have been very accepting. A lot of my younger patients think it is cool that their nurse has a wheelchair just like them.

I graduated in November 2004 – the proudest day of my life. As I walked across the stage, I had tears in my eyes. The biggest lesson that I have learned from this entire experience is to never let go of a dream.”

Excerpt from a chapter by Marianne Haugh, RN, BSN, in “Leave No Nurse Behind: Nurses Working with Disabilities” by Donna Mabeady, EdD, ARNP.



Let's YAC About It

Expressions of my innermost feelings

This is a candid conversation between Sarah Sickles and a staff member at the Tuscaloosa CRS office.

It is a reflection of the many relationships built as a result of services provided by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Sarah is a beautiful 14-year-old teenager diagnosed with Ehler-Danlos syndrome and amplified musculoskeletal pain or reflex neurovascular dystrophy (RND). I hope you find this communication via email as intriguing as I did.

Vivian Spears

Parent Consultant, Tuscaloosa

I'm sending this letter to you just to let you know a little bit about how I feel. I have been diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome along with pain amplification syndrome. I live in constant pain and discomfort every day. This pain causes depression, fatigue, insomnia, and tons of other problems.

I am terrified and worried about the future constantly, even though that only makes it worse. Will I be in a wheelchair? Will I have heart complications? Maybe I will be alright, but no one knows. I can't do many of the things I enjoy because of the pain it brings to my life. I become angry, but it's not at you; I am mad at my disease. I try to act like I don't hurt at all, but that's not always the case.

Please don't think I'm not just like you because I really am. I am just a little bit more fragile, and I get hurt a little easier, but inside I am still the same person I've always been. If I make the wrong decision in my life, I'm the one who has to deal with the pain and consequences. I can take care of myself no matter what anyone says. I'm scared to open up and tell anyone about my disease because



I'm pretty sure I know how they will react. I know that the people who truly care about me and love me as much as they say they do will understand, but I still have a right to be scared.

Don't tell me that I can be fixed by simply drinking Jell-O or some other thing like that because I have tried things like that, and they just don't work.

PLEASE don't say you know how I feel because you really don't. Even another person with EDS only has an idea because every person with this disease is different. Just offer your support and understanding, which I find, so far, is the best thing I can have. I know I don't look sick, but you don't know how I feel on the inside. So, please don't judge me or pity me in any way.

Even on a good day I feel like a normal person does – when they have the flu ... tired, achy, and sore. Everyday in my world is different; knee pain and ankle pain one day, shoulder and wrist pain the next day. It is

tough, but I smile and get through it. I don't show how I feel with the depression, anxiety, and anger. I think it is best for all the people around me, even though I know inside that it is really bad for me.

Last, but definitely not least, please remember that I am the same person inside and I am the same person that I have always been. I may hurt but I can still do normal things like a typical teenager my age. This disease affects my body, but not my spirit and soul.

I still feel emotions no matter whether I show them or not. I still love all of you and never forget that. I am me, not my EDS. What I need most is gentle hugs, support, understanding, and love just like everyone else.

*Lots of Love,
Sarah Ann Sickles*

Family Voices produces fact sheets detailing 'Bright Futures' themes

Family Voices has partnered with the American Academy of Pediatrics for many years in the development of "Bright Futures for Families" materials. This year, they will be developing fact sheets detailing each of the 10 Bright Futures themes. We will highlight each in this newsletter over the coming months. First, "Promoting Community Relationships and Resources":

Bright Futures recognizes that a community contributes to the health and well-being of families who live there. Communities are more than just the people in your neighborhood. They include health and social services, schools, local government, and other resources. These services affect quality of life.

- **People:** How "connected" are you to others in your community? You can help ensure the health and well-being of your family by building relationships with neighbors, health providers, teachers, coaches, town officials, and others. When you are active in your community, you are more aware of available resources - before you need them. And, you will be able to offer support to others. Whom can you count on for support? Who can count on you?

- **Resources:** Does your community provide the resources your family needs? Is there easy access to medical care? Are there schools, libraries and safe places to play? Are there community activities for children and teens? Do you know where to buy healthy,

affordable food? Are there buses, subways or trains so you can get places you need to go?

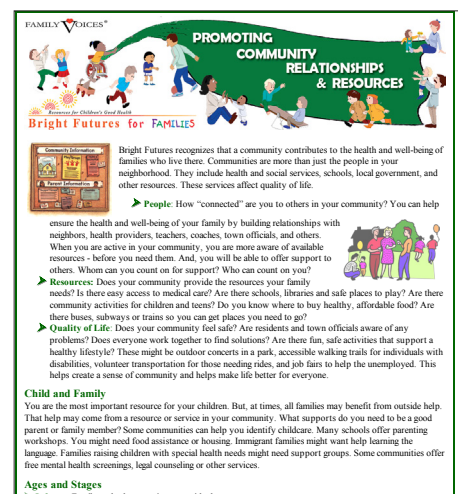
- **Quality of Life:** Does your community feel safe? Are residents and town officials aware of any problems? Does everyone work together to find solutions? Are there fun, safe activities that support a healthy lifestyle? These might be outdoor concerts in a park, accessible walking trails for individuals with disabilities, volunteer transportation for those needing rides, and job fairs to help the unemployed. This helps create a sense of community and helps make life better for everyone.

- **Child and Family:** You are the most important resource for your children. But, at times, all families may benefit from outside help. That help may come from a resource or service in your community. What supports do you need to be a good parent or family member? Some communities can help you identify childcare. Many schools offer parenting workshops. You might need food assistance or housing. Immigrant families might want help learning the language. Families raising children with special health needs might need support groups. Some communities offer free mental health screenings, legal counseling or other services.

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Credits

The American Academy of Pediatrics is



the home of Bright Futures. This material is adapted for families from Hagan JE, Shaw JS, Duncan PM, eds, 2008. Bright Futures Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents, 3rd Edition, Elk Grove, IL See "Promoting Community Relationships and Resources," pgs 193 – 201. See also: brightfutures.aap.org.

Bright Futures Themes:

Promoting ...

Family Support • Child Development • Mental Health • Healthy Weight • Healthy Food and Eating • Physical Activity • Dental Health • Healthy Sexual Development and Sexuality • Safety and Injury Prevention • Community Relationships and Resources

For information about Family Voices, please contact the Alabama state coordinators, Susan Colburn 334-293-7041, susan.colburn@rehab.alabama.gov or Jerry Oveson 251-438-1609, oveson@bellsouth.net.

Funderful Times – *Mini-notebooks and mini-albums*

Do you take a lot of pictures? Then, do you wonder where you should put them or what to do with them? As a caregiver, do you wonder how you could find some respite time without having to leave home? Personally, I would love to spend my time at the local coffee shop enjoying a chai-latte and a pastry or two. However, due to the care I provide at home, it isn't easy to just leave home.

So, during the winter months, I took the opportunity to learn new techniques for my work. I should tell you first that I am a mixed-media artist and a makeup artist. (I can't recall if I shared that with you in past articles.) When I began taking care of my parents, especially my father, who has since passed, I found that I needed an outlet to escape from my daily routine, so I began creating various types of art. Then I was asked to do the makeup for various occasions. Thus, my new career was born.

In much the same way, the paper art of making mini-scrapbook albums was born. I love paper crafts anyway, so I began watching various videos on YouTube and found that I really like the idea of making these mini-albums and even small notebooks. Your photos can fit easily into the pages, tags or slip pockets inside the mini-album. As is the case with most people, money isn't readily available to go buy lots of things for such a



craft, but I found that coffee sleeves work great for making mini-notebooks or mini-albums.

The photos shown here are of an example of a mini-notebook that I made from a coffee sleeve (or coffee collar as I like to call them) by cutting it on the sides in half. I then took white cardstock paper and traced the collar

onto the paper, cutting each page out. Next, I cut holes on one end so that I could add a ring in two places. On the collar, I heat-embossed the insides with gold embossing powder and a VersaMark pad. Then I added some scrap paper to the opposite sides of the coffee collar and some die cut letters and a flower to the front. Finally, I added ribbons to one of the rings after I put the mini-notebook together.

This project took about 30 minutes total to make. It was a simple, inexpensive project that will make a wonderful gift. These would be handy to carry in your purse to write notes to yourself or to make lists of things you need to discuss with your doctor or your teacher. Teen-agers love to make and give these to their friends as well.

Try adding newspaper print or pages from an old magazine to the coffee collars and use sandpaper on the insides for a roughed up look. The possibilities are endless. So, take some time and play with paper.

Rita Hutcheson-Cobbs
Parent, Somerville



Rita shows the inside cover of a mini-notebook with two rings binding the pages together

PEATC launches new iPhone app for families and youth with disabilities

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — The Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) is pleased to announce the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Checklist iPhone application. The IEP is an individualized program designed to support the educational needs of school-age students with disabilities.

This new IEP app helps parents of students with special needs become better-informed advocates by making IEP information easier to access.

"The playing field for families just got more level," said Cherie Takemoto, PEATC's executive director. "With this new app, parents can use their iPhone to make notes on their child's IEP, and access critical information quickly."

Special education professionals can also benefit from the IEP app.

"As a special education attorney, I am always

looking for ways to help empower parents as advocates for children with disabilities. This innovative application will be a welcome tool to assist parents and professionals in keeping track of the procedures and required elements of an effective IEP," said William B. Reichhardt, a lawyer in Fairfax, Va.

Robert Pasternack, former assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services sees the great potential that this device has for improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

"This innovative use of technology by PEATC gives parents, students, and teachers a new tool leading to more effective participation and, hopefully, improved quality of IEPs," he said.

Parents will have information at their fingertips.

"Being a pediatrician makes me

knowledgeable about many things regarding child development and medical issues. Unfortunately, that knowledge doesn't help me advocate for my child with special needs in the school system. IEP meetings can be intimidating, even for me. The IEP checklist is a wonderful tool that helps me feel more secure," said Subarna Basu Dharia.

The IEP app is offered free of charge.

"We want to give parents a chance to use it and to see how it works for them," said Takemoto.

A special IEP app launch reception is being held on Thursday, January 28, 2010 at 4:30 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency in Crystal City.

To learn how to access the iPhone IEP app, visit: www.peatc.org.

Catherine Burzio,
PEATC transition coordinator

St. Patrick's Day Word Search



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SNAKES
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IRISH
POT OF GOLD
POTATO
RAINBOW
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What's Ahead

- March 14-20, 2010** *8th annual "Cover the Uninsured Week,"* takes place in cities and towns all across the country.
- March 25, 2010** *Special Education Overview*, presented by Alabama Parent Education Center and hosted by the Elmore County Special Needs Special People (SNSP) Support Group, 409 N. Alabama St., Room 120 (former Wetumpka Junior High School), 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Registration is free. For reservations, call (334) 567-2252 or toll free at (866) 532-7660. Leave your name and telephone number and mention code #39.
- March 30, 2010** *Autism Matters Legislative Day* at the State House.
- June 6-10, 2010** *Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum*, Troy University. For more information, contact Becky Fields at (251) 479-8611.
- June 23 -25, 2010** *Alabama Association for Persons in Supported Employment (AL-APSE) Conference*, Renaissance Montgomery Hotel and Spa. For more information, call AL-APSE at (334) 353-7713.
- Local PAC meetings:** Check your local CRS office for dates and times of meetings in your area.